

Former President of Lebanon: Christians in Middle East Face "Existential Crisis"

Former President Amine Gemayal Condemns "Conspiracy of Silence" on Issue

Jun 08, 2013, 11:10 ET from Christian Solidarity International (CSI) (<http://www.prnewswire.com/news/christian+solidarity+international+%28csi%29>)



OXFORD, England, June 8, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Amine Gemayal, the former president of Lebanon, warned today that Christians in the Middle East face an "existential crisis," due to the "dangerous phenomenon of religious cleansing."

Gemayal's speech, entitled, "The Future of Religious Minorities in the Middle East," was delivered at a conference on the topic hosted by St. Antony's College in Oxford and supported by Christian Solidarity International (CSI), a Christian human rights group.

"Christians are often victims of persecution by both the state and society in the Middle East," Gemayal said, through attacks on communities, churches and priests. Speaking specifically of the ongoing civil war in Syria, Gemayal said that the abduction in April of two archbishops in Aleppo by suspected jihadists "sent an important message: 'We don't want Christians in Syria.'"

Gemayal warned that "the disappearance of Christianity from the Arab World would be a tremendous blow to the region and Muslims themselves," dimming the prospects for long-term peace and threatening the region's religiously-plural society -- a society, as Gemayal stressed, that is indigenous to the region and preceded the arrival of Islam. "A better future for all depends on respecting pluralism," he said.

Noting the lack of involvement from the international community in this crisis, Gemayal decried an "international conspiracy of silence to keep these issues aside." "How can they remain silent in the face of these issues?" he asked.

Gemayal called for an international response to the current crises in the Middle East. "The international community can and must assist in the process of transitioning to democracy in the Arab world," he said, especially in "critical areas such as democracy and human rights." Gemayal also called on the international community to "impose economic sanctions and further measures on governments that deviate from these values."

Gemayal also called for improving education systems in the region to emphasize "tolerance, togetherness and partnership," and for creating "a civic society" in the region "that can manage and overcome the crisis of pluralism."

"The challenge for Arab Muslims now is to prove to the world that the region is capable of achieving pluralist freedom," the former president concluded. "Now is the time to formulate and implement solutions."

Amine Gemayal was president of Lebanon from 1982 to 1988 and is the leader of Lebanon's Kataeb Party.

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Christian Solidarity International (CSI) is a Christian human rights group campaigning for religious liberty and human dignity worldwide. In response to mounting attacks on Christians and other groups, CSI has issued a Genocide Warning for religious minorities in the Islamic Middle East.

Video of Gemayal's talk and lectures from other authorities on the topic can be found at www.middle-east-minorities.com. More information about CSI is available at www.csi-usa.org.

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